



# FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT Update



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*John C. Twiss, Forest Supervisor*

## Greetings! We Heard You!

The Phase II Amendment process has reached another important milestone. The Black Hills National Forest Leadership Team, working with cooperating agencies in South Dakota and Wyoming and examining public input, has identified alternatives for consideration in the environmental impact statement for the Phase II Amendment to the 1997 Revised Forest Plan. Your contributions helped us reach this critical point.

In September, the Forest hosted four open houses in various locations around the Forest to inform you about the Phase II Amendment alternative development process and to receive input. The turnout was impressive; over 100 people attended the open houses, and hundreds provided written comments, letters, and e-mails.

Over the last couple months, members of the Interdisciplinary Team have reviewed your information, met with the state cooperating agencies, conducted workshops, and developed six alternatives that reflect the diverse range of ideas and interests expressed

in your comments. This newsletter provides an overview of the alternatives and describes the next steps in the Amendment process.

Many thanks to those who have helped the Forest in this process. I hope you will continue to be involved as we move forward because your participation will make our Forest Plan stronger and more successful.

*John C. Twiss, Forest Supervisor*  
Black Hills National Forest



# Phase II Amendment

## of the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

### Summary of Public Comments on Alternatives

As expected, people shared a variety of ideas during the alternative development process. Some offered general suggestions while others gave very specific recommendations. Many comments favored one of two overall approaches to managing the Black Hills National Forest:

- Emphasizing preservation of sensitive species and ecosystems, including reducing human disturbances like roads and logging.
- Using timber management as a forest management tool to provide for species viability and to reduce the risk of fire, insects, and disease.

Comments specifically related to the scope of the Phase II Amendment included the following:

**Species Viability** – Some commentors wanted protection and preservation of sensitive species and their habitat to be the priority while others felt the risk would be greater to sensitive species dependent on early successional forests under a preservation emphasis. Others thought species viability should be balanced with other uses.

**Research Natural Areas (RNAs)** – Many commentors thought RNAs should be designated to conserve examples of unique ecosystems on the Forest. Others were concerned that RNAs would preclude existing Forest uses while increasing risks from fire, insects, disease, and weeds. Some commentors thought RNAs should not be designated unless they have distinct and meaningful purposes.

**Fire, Insects, and Disease** – In response to many of the comments and in consultation with the States of South Dakota and Wyoming, we expanded the scope of the Phase II Amendment decision to address risks from fire, insects, and disease, especially near communities at risk (as defined in 66 FR 751,1/4/01; 66 FR 160, 8/17/01) and other private lands.

**Timber Land Suitability** – Most comments on timber land dealt with managing fire, insects, disease, and weeds. Specific comments ranged from designating the entire forest as suitable for timber harvest to comments protecting old growth and unroaded areas from logging.

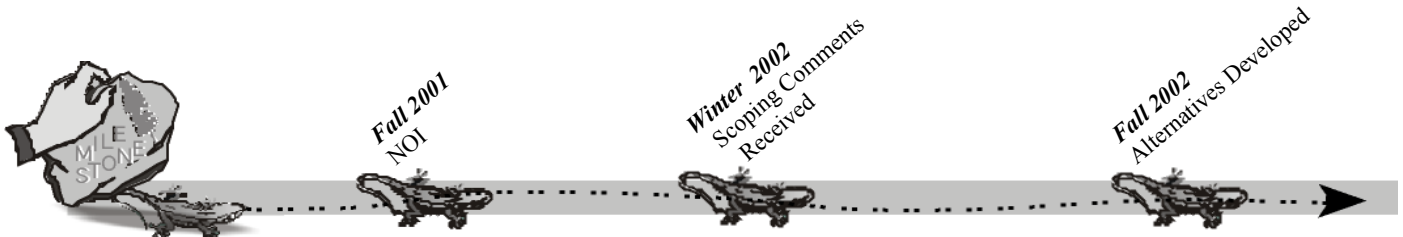
**Deer and Elk Direction** – Most commentors agreed that the habitat capability model (HABCAP) should be supplemented with on-the-ground data.

**Outputs** – Comments on outputs ranged from eliminating logging altogether to maximizing the allowable sale quantity. Some commentors thought livestock grazing should be reduced or eliminated in some areas while others thought grazing should not change.



### Purpose and Need for the Phase II Amendment

Photos from the 1874 Custer Expedition show that the Black Hills looked very different from the way it appears today. In the late 1800s, the forested areas had higher ratios of aspen, hardwoods, and openings to conifers. In addition, pine forests were less dense. The mix of species that inhabited those areas has changed and become less diverse. Historically, only about 60 percent of the Black Hills was forested compared to at least 86 percent today. Ponderosa pine has become prolific within the Black Hills, encroaching on most other vegetation types where left undisturbed. Those changes may now threaten people and private property and may pose risks to the future viability of some species that inhabit the Forest.



Forest management has been necessary to accommodate community development and population growth in the Black Hills. For example, forest fires once accepted as a natural part of the ecosystem have been suppressed to protect people, property, and forest products, creating a dangerous build-up of vegetation that could become fuel for larger and more dangerous fires. In addition, recent drought has increased the fire hazard. Both the changes in vegetation and drought have added to the threat of insect infestation and disease.

Fires, insects, and disease are natural processes in a forest and help thin dense vegetation. Decades of fire suppression combined with reduced logging have created a denser forest where fires and insect epidemics are likely to be more intense and cause more damage. Such fires not only threaten humans but also the viability of emphasis species. Several plant species occur in only one or two locations on the forest; a single fire could remove these species from the Black Hills.

The Black Hills of 100 to 150 years ago can be used for guidance on seeking conditions more resilient to fire, insects, and disease and supporting greater species diversity. RNAs can also help by providing benchmarks to use in designing management approaches. Human alterations prevent a complete return to the forest conditions of Custer's era, but the Phase II Amendment can help bring more variation back into the Forest.

Accomplishing this purpose means changes in how the Forest is managed for species viability and fire, insect, and disease risk. Combined with possible new RNAs, these changes can affect the acres of timber land managed for long-term sustained yield as well as the output of other goods and services projected in the Forest Plan.

The Phase II Amendment seeks to move the Black Hills National Forest to a condition that provides for species viability, public safety, property protection, sustainability, and the goods and services people demand—in the words of Gifford Pinchot, “the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run.”

*Want to know more about how the Black Hills have changed? Read **Exploring with Custer: The 1874 Black Hills Expedition**, by Ernst Grafe and Paul Horsted, 2002.*

## Alternatives

We carefully examined the comments submitted during the public input period in developing six alternatives to consider for the Black Hills National Forest direction. They are as follows:

**Alternative 1: 1997 Revised Forest Plan.** This alternative is the same as the 1997 Plan Revision.

**Alternative 2: Phase I Amendment.** This alternative consists of the 1997 Plan as modified by the Phase I Amendment adopted in 2001.

**Alternative 3: Diversity Across the Landscape.** This alternative is focused on a more varied forest with some elements of the landscape closer to the greater vegetative diversity that once existed.

**Alternative 4: Additional Mature Forest.** This alternative would retain more areas for mature forest and would have more of the forest condition determined by natural processes.

**Alternative 5: Harvest Equal to Growth.** This alternative would allow timber to be harvested at the same rate as it grows. Pine stands would become less dense than they are today.

**Alternative 6: Catastrophic Risk Reduction.** This alternative emphasizes decreasing the risk of insect and disease and fire hazard. While all the alternatives seek to reduce the hazards of catastrophic events to people, property, and Forest resources, this alternative would do the most to reduce these risks and hazards.

**Spring 2003**  
Draft EIS Available  
for Public Review

**Summer 2003**  
End of Public  
Comment Period

**Fall 2003**  
Final EIS Complete

**Fall 2003**  
Record of Decision





## ***Phase II Amendment Decision Areas***

- Species Viability
- Research Natural Areas
- Fire, Insect, and Disease Risk
- Suitable Timber Land
- Deer and Elk Habitat Analysis
- Outputs

## **Next Steps**

The next important milestone in the Phase II Amendment process will be the publication of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement, scheduled to come out next spring. At that time, you will have a chance to review and comment on our analysis and findings. We will also hold meetings where you can share your comments.

***We Hope to See You There!***

## **The Website**

Go to the Internet website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/fp/planning/99Amend/Amend.htm> to view the Black Hills National Forest Plan Amendment documents.

## **Mailing List**

Individuals and groups that have traditionally received this type of information in the mail will continue to be on the mailing list. Anyone wishing to be added to or deleted from the list may do so by contacting Peggy Woodward at 605-673-9263.

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